

Celebrating Hanukkah

The Story of Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight-day holiday celebrated by Jewish people around the world. It takes place in November or December each year. The Hebrew (Jewish) calendar determines the date.

Hanukkah celebrates events that took place in Judea more than 2,000 years ago. Judea is now called Israel. A Syrian king tried to force Jewish people to reject their religion. After many battles a small Jewish army defeated the King's army.

After the victory the Jewish people went to the temple to clean and reclaim it. When they lit the oil lamp there was only enough oil for one day. Then something special happened. This tiny amount of oil stayed lit for eight days.

Hanukkah is known as the Festival of Lights. Jews celebrate Hanukkah to mark the victory over the Syrians. It lasts for eight days to celebrate the miracle of the oil.

The Celebration of Hanukkah

Hanukkah is often celebrated at home among family and friends. Candles are lit in a menorah or candleholder. The menorah holds 9 candles in a row. On the first night the center candle and one other are lit. After that another candle is lit and so on for the eight nights. Blessings and songs are sung each night. It is a tradition to give gifts or coins to family and friends each night.

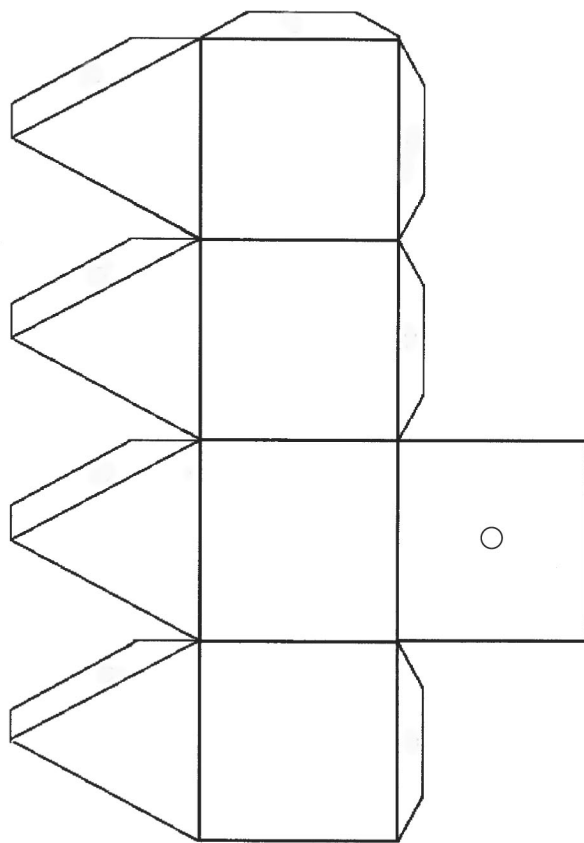








A Hanukkah Tradition

Children often play a game with a top called a *dreidel*. Hebrew letters, one on each side, stand for the words, "A great miracle happened there."

The *dreidel* is a four-sided top. Copy the *dreidel* pattern onto heavy paper or thin cardboard. Decorate the four sides of the *dreidel* with the four symbols putting one on each side. Cut out the *dreidel* pattern and glue the flaps to form a top. Push a straw or stick through the circle on the top of the *dreidel* until it touches the bottom point.



The game can be played with any number of people. Each player needs 20 markers. These can be small candies, raisins, or nuts. Before each turn, every player places two markers in the center. Players take turns spinning the *dreidel*. Depending on what symbol is on top when the *dreidel* stops, do the following:

-  *nun* – do nothing
-  *gimel* – take everything
-  *hay* – take half
-  *shin* – put one in

A person wins by getting all of the markers.